DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 446 CS 208 466

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TITLE Cohort Analysis of Variations in Political Knowledge.
PUB DATE Aug 84
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (69th, Gainesville, FL, August 5-8, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Age Differences; *Cohort Analysis; *Knowledge Level; *Mass Media; Mass Media Effects; *Media Research; *Political Socialization; Politics
IDENTIFIERS *Media Use

ABSTRACT

A cohort analysis of data gathered in three national election surveys (1956, 1968, 1980) was used to study the effect of media use on political knowledge, which was divided into knowledge of issues, personalities, and political parties. Knowledge levels were calculated by creating indices from open-ended questions about why a person liked or disliked a candidate. Since the number of questions varied in each study, Z scores were calculated and crosstabulated with each age group. The subjects were divided into five age groups (18-29, 30-41, 42-53, 54-65, and 66 and older), and the data analyzed for age, period, and cohort effects. Results indicated that all age groups declined steadily in media use from 1956 to 1980. The youngest cohort showed a stronger increase in personality related knowledge than older cohorts; the youngest cohort also showed increased issue knowledge and political knowledge in general, while the older cohorts declined in both areas. The findings suggest that (1) the ability of the youngest cohort to increase in political knowledge while declining in media use may be explained by the existence of a "media generation," rather than a television generation; and (2) the youngest group is more efficient in its use of media than the older groups. (FL)

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ED246446

COHORT ANALYSIS

OF VARIATIONS IN POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

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Paper presented to Communication Theory & Methodology, Mass Communication and Society Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications convention, Gainesville, Fla., August 1984

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ABSTRACT

Cohort Analysis of Variations in Political Knowledge
By Ed Caudill (University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill)

Five age groups are studied in terms of political knowledge and media use. Political knowledge is divided into three areas: issue, personality and party.

Three University of Michigan national election surveys (1956, 1968, 1980) provided the data for analyzing political knowledge and the three subdivisions in terms of cohort effect, period effect and age effect. Variables drawn from each survey included age, media use and opinions about candidates.

Results showed increasing personality knowledge from 1956 to 1980, and the youngest cohort showed a greater increase in personality-related knowledge than older cohorts. The younger cohort also increased in general political knowledge while the older cohorts declined. All age groups showed a decline in media use. Cohort, age and period effects are seen in the study.

It is argued that the ability of the younger cohort to increase in political knowledge while declining in media use with all other age groups may be explained by the existence of a "media generation," rather than a TV generation. The younger group is more efficient in its use of media and, subsequently, is able to get more information than the older groups from a given amount of media.

COHORT ANALYSIS OF VARIATIONS IN POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

Research indicates wide variations in media use and effects for different age groups. Media use and its effects on the public may not have the "mass" effects that are often assumed. That media use has an impact on knowledge of political affairs is well documented. Still at issue is the way media affect the character of knowledge in different age groups.

Literature in the political knowledge-media realm builds the basis for hypotheses that presume a shallow nature for broadcast media as opposed to a more analytical, in-depth approach for newspapers and magazines.

In this study, the impact of media on five different age groups will be studied in national election studies in 1956, 1968 and 1980. In addition, political knowledge will be divided into issue, personality and party categories to explore the relationship between the kinds of knowledge, media use and age groups.

Clarke and Fredin (1978) found use of newspapers correlates positively with having reasons for preferring one U.S. senatorial candidate over another. They also found television exposure negatively correlated with political "reasoning" to a nearly significant degree.

Ziemke and Leutscher (1979), studying decline in partisanship as it was related to media use, focused primarily on changes in the level of partisanship and TV dependence, and correlation between the two. They believed TV contributed to a

decline in partisanship, an activity that for purposes of this study might be seen as having an effect on knowledge of party activity and politics.

They suggest the greatest impact on the decline of partisanship would be among the young. The researchers' study showed a general decline in partisanship from 1952-1976 and a general increase in partisanship with age and cohort group. Most of the effects on partisanship were accounted for by campaign media use, age of the respondent and the period in which the study was conducted.

Though the results are inconsistent, Ziemke and Leutscher believe a negative relationship between television dependence and partisanship occurred in 1976 and 1968. (Some younger groups showed a negative effect across several elections and three older cohorts a positive relationship.)

Robinson, Rusk and Head (1969) addressed the broader area of knowledge of issues, not restricting themselves to just partisanship. They concluded that the trend has been for people to be more aware and informed about political matters now than in the past. Noting that education is related to higher information levels, they point out that higher educational levels and wider exposure to mass media have increased the number of people who hold knowledgeable and meaningful opinions on political issues. However, they also note that issues may be more complicated now than in the past, leading to more anxiety and uncertainty -- which in turn may lead to a smaller percentage of people willing to venture opinions.

They seem to imply that higher education and media use are offset by the complexity of the issues. If this is true, one might expect period effects in a cohort analysis to be diminished by factors that would cause a balancing of long-term effects.

Chaffee (1979), exploring political involvement relative to newspapers rather than TV, found evidence to support the proposition that newspaper reading is closely related to political involvement. He concluded that political involvement supports newspaper use, which supports more political involvement; the same is true in the opposite direction for non-involvement in politics.

He found that "newspaper droppers" from 1974-76 were predominantly younger citizens who had a low attention level to politics in both TV and newspapers. Chaffee pointed out that young people were not as likely to depend on newspapers as their parents and that the differences persist as a person matures, evidently implying a cohort effect and not maturational effect in a cohort analysis.

The catch to making any sweeping conclusions about young people abandoning newspapers, however, is in the fact that Chaffee found "newspaper adders" also to be disproportionately young. He suggests that a differentiation in the group is a possible explanation, perhaps a "knowledge gap" developing.

He does not attempt to differentiate the knowledge. Also, his "younger" category is anyone under 40, and such a large age category may not be capturing various age group effects.

Chaffee and Choe (1981), in a study of newspaper reading

habits, said young people in a world of expanding media choice are less likely than their predecessors to adopt newspaper reading as a part of daily life.

Robinson (1967), exploring media use and information levels, reported media use to be a predictor of knowledge when controlling for education, which was the best predictor of information levels. He reported that analytical information sources such as newspapers and magazines were heavily used in groups with higher information levels. TV and radio were seldom mentioned as sources for these groups. He noted that TV has been gaining while other media hold steady or decline in usage.

Stevenson and White (1980) add a complicating twist to hypotheses about TV viewing and its effect on attitudes and information: TV news viewing may be accidental and is often part of a larger pattern of TV use, functioning as background for other activities. Newspaper reading, on the other hand, is more purposeful and demands more attention from the news consumer. They also point out the problems with operational definitions of measurements for reading and watching, a problem compounded by asking respondents to describe their own behavior.

A number of problems are presented in these studies of mass media use and knowledge levels. There are always problems with measuring influence of mass media; a cohort analysis is well suited to dealing with issues of effects unique to a particular age group, generation or time period.

The cohort analysis method has raised some issues, such as what is being analyzed and the method of statistical analysis.

Norval Glenn explains in "Cohort Analysis" (1977) that one can identify whether shifts in age groups across time are due to age, generation or period factors. If age factors are at work, one would see differences between various cohorts at a given point in time. If period factors are at work, changes occur in all age groups across time. Changes in a generation are observed by studying a given cohort as it ages.

Robinson and Jeffres (1980) argue that cohort analysis can identify whether shifts in age groups across time are due to age, generation or period factors. In their study of declining newspaper readership, they argue that if age factors were at work in the decline since the 1950s then one would see more younger people reading more papers as they grew older. If generation factors were to blame, there would be lasting differences across the cohorts. If period factors are at issue, then there would be declines in all age groups across time. Their study showed generational differences -- there was no evidence that younger people read more newspapers with advancing age. They conclude that younger people do read newspapers less than their elders.

Hyman also considers a theory of generations -- each cohort is presumed to be shaped distinctively and primarily by conditions during the formative years. A generation is imprinted by events and features during one critical phase of development and somehow insulated from later experience. This would support the approach that will be taken in this study, which contends that a difference must exist between the cohorts that are being studied and that the younger cohorts are going to focus more on

television news than older cohorts.

An assumption at work in cohort analysis, according to Hyman, is that the groups being compared represent equivalent individuals differing only in the point of the life cycle or aging process they have reached.

In addressing the problem of equivalence of indicators in different surveys in various periods, Hyman notes that it would be preferable to have the same questions asked, but that may not always be the case. The same question may be conceptually different in years or questions that are not the same may be conceptually similar, the latter being the case for data used in this study.

Glenn points out that a cohort analysis deals only with the net effect of change, that it does not deal with individuals. For example, an analysis showing 20 percent of a cohort was Republican in 1960 and 20 percent still Republican in 1970 only means there were equal movements in opposite directions within the cohort; it does not measure individual movement in and out of the party.

A cohort analysis is appropriate for this study because it will deal with these generational, age group and period effects. The questions posed here deal not just with kinds or levels of information but the differences between age groups and generations in their political information.

The literature suggests light users of media could be expected to obtain most or all of their information from television and, to a lesser extent, radio. High users of media

will use all media to varying degrees and end up with a generally higher level of information. Newspapers and magazines could be expected to provide the basis for more issue-oriented knowledge. As a result, those with issue knowledge might also possess knowledge of candidates' personalities, but the reverse is not necessarily true if light users of media go first to television and the medium is a "shallow" one.

If, in fact, older age groups are heavier users of newspapers than younger ones, then higher levels of issue information and knowledge related to political parties would be expected in older age groups. This effect is compounded by the presumed predominance of television among young voters, those who were born in the 1950s or growing up while television came into being.

It follows from the above that older age groups would have higher levels of general political knowledge than younger groups since the older groups are expected to be heavier users of media and more involved in newspapers and magazines, which provide more detail and analysis of issues. Political knowledge pertaining to party philosophy also would be stronger in older age groups because strong identification with parties has been declining in the last few decades.

METHOD

Data for this study were taken from three University of Michigan national election surveys, 1956, 1968 and 1980. These years were chosen in order to give the cohorts a substantial difference; to have picked years that were closer together would

have made the cohorts less than 10 years. The 12-year difference in cohorts is close to the commonly used 10-year standard. The number of cases used in the analysis for each year were: 1956, 1,762; 1958, 1,673; 1980, 1,614.

The variables drawn from each set of data concerned media use, age and opinions about candidates. Open-ended questions in the data were presented in several different ways. In 1956 and 1980, respondents were asked why they would or would not vote for a candidate. In 1968, respondents were asked what the differences in the candidates were. The U.M. researchers coded and placed in categories responses that indicated like or dislike for a candidate based on character, leadership ability, experience, philosophy, the candidate as a good or bad respresentative of party philosophy, the groups the candidate was perceived to be aligned with or opposed to, domestic policy and foreign policy. The questions on media use asked how much the respondent uses a particular medium, ranging from none to very frequently.

A respondent's total number of responses to the open-ended questions were used to create an index of political knowledge. Using a total number of responses to index political knowledge makes no assumptions as to the "correctness" of a respondent's opinion about a candidate. This only presumes that political knowledge is necessary in order to respond to such open-ended questions; the more responses one makes to these questions, the higher one scores in the index. The answers were then categorized so as to break political knowledge into three areas: issue, which reflected a respondent's opinion of the candidate's stance on

issues; personality, which gauged the respondent's like or dislike of a candidate's personality traits; and party, which was a measure of the respondent's opinion of the candidate based on the candidate's position relative to the political party to which he belonged, Democrat or Republican except for Anderson's Independent bid in 1980.

Responses placed in the categories of like or dislike of a candidate based on character, leadership ability, experience and philosophy were used to create an index for personality knowledge. The more responses a person had in these categories, the higher the score on the personality knowledge index. The domestic and foreign policy categories were the basis for an index of issue knowledge, with a greater number of responses in these categories creating a higher score on the issue knowledge index. Finally, the responses used to create an index of party knowledge were those indicating whether or not the respondent felt the candidate was a good or bad representative of the party, and what groups the respondent perceived the candidate to be aligned with or opposed to.

The age variable was collapsed into 12-year cohorts, a categorization that would allow an individual to move sequentially from one cohort to the next from 1956 to 1968 to 1980 and not cause individuals to either skip an age group (which would have occurred if smaller cohorts were used) or to remain in the same age group in two different periods (if cohorts of more than 12 years were used). The resulting age groups for the three time periods were 18-29, 30-41, 42-53, 54-65, and 66

and older. An individual could remain in the oldest age groups for more than one time period, but this group was not dealt with as a cohort in this study.

In each of the three data sets, an index for media was constructed by adding up responses to questions about newspaper, television, radio and magazine use. In each of the periods, the scale ranged from zero to four because respondents were asked about the same four media in each study -- newspapers, television, radio and magazines. The structure of the questions varied only slightly from one study to the next, each time the question being aimed at gauging media use. A respondent was scored as a user of a particular medium when indicating frequent or very frequent use of the medium.

Because the scales were the same for media use in each of the years, mean scores were computed in crosstabulation with age groups. A mean score of one, for example, shows members of the age groups had an average use of one medium for their news.

The scales for scores on political knowledge, issue knowledge, party knowledge and personality knowledge, however, varied greatly as a result of different questions and responses in each of the studies and three candidates rather than two in 1980. For these crosstabulations with age groups, Z scores were used.

Z scores made it possible to compare the personality, issue and party knowledge scores despite the differences in raw numbers of questions in each of the three election years studied. Thus, the number of responses in a given category did not need to

contain the same number of possible responses for the years being studied. There is no measure of a mean score on the various categories of political knowledge as a result of using Z scores. The use of Z scores, however, permitted comparison for measuring trends in a group's relation to a mean of zero. Whether a group is above, below or at the mean is measured and compared over the three years in the study.

After creating the tables, three different effects were considered: age, indicated by reading across the table; period, by reading down a table; and cohort effect, studied by reading the diagonal path of a cohort as it aged from one time period to the next.

A Peason's R correlation was run on the variables being considered: age, media, political knowledge, issue knowledge, party knowledge and personality knowledge. The correlations between political knowledge and its three subsets, party, issue and personality, were not considered because the indices used to create the subsets shared variables with the general category of political knowledge. Comparing the subsets to the primary variable would be correlating some variables with themselves.

The issues raised in the previous section will be addressed with the following hypotheses:

1) Media use and political knowledge will correlated across all cohorts.

2) Media use will be correlated with issue knowledge.

3) Political knowledge has become more personality oriented for all age groups and less issue and party oriented for all ages (period effect).

4) Cohorts that were 30-41 and 42-53 in 1956 will show

greater party knowledge than the cohort that was 18-29 in 1956 (cohort effect).

5) The cohort that was 18-29 in 1956 will show greater personality knowledge than other cohort groups (cohort effect).

6) Cohorts that were 30-42 and 42-53 in 1956 will show greater issue knowledge than the cohort that was 18-29 in 1956 (cohort effect).

7) Quantity of political knowledge will be higher in the cohorts that were 30-42 and 42-53 in 1956 than the cohort that was 18-29 in 1956 (cohort effect).

RESULTS

The results of the study are displayed in Tables 1-5, the first four presenting political knowledge and its three subdivisions as Z scores, and the final table providing mean scores for media use.

A cohort analysis depends as much on interpretation of the data as on the descriptive power of the statistics. For interpreting the tables, period effect is detected by reading down a column, age effect by reading across a table in the row for an age group, and cohort effect by reading the diagonal of a table that tracks a cohort as it ages.

In 1968 and 1956, the correlation between media use and political knowledge was 0.4 at the .00 level, supporting the first hypothesis. The correlation between media use and political knowledge in 1980 was small but statistically significant, 0.1 at .00 level.

The correlations between media and issue knowledge, however, were low in 1968 (0.2 at .00 level) and 1956 (0.1 at .00 level) and virtually nonexistent in 1980, failing to support the second hypothesis.

Personality knowledge either increased or stayed nearly constant from 1956 to 1980. Though some of the age groups

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Table 1 about here

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declined slightly in issue knowledge from 1956 to 1968, such as the 42-53 group, all of the age groups have an equal or higher personality knowledge Z score in 1980 than in 1956. This supported the third hypothesis.

The cohort that was 18-29 in 1956 was inconsistent in its party knowledge, with a score of -.06 in 1956, .12 in 1968, and .00 in 1980. The cohort that was 30-41 in 1956, showed consistent

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Table 2 about here

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party knowledge, with scores only ranging from .04 to .06. Though higher than the 18-29 cohort in 1956 and 1980, the younger cohort has a score of .12 in 1968, compared to the older cohort's .06. The 42-53 cohort in 1956 is the weakest one in party knowledge and shows a negative score in all three time periods. The cohort's scores ranged from -.01 to -.06 and were consistently the lowest except in 1956, when the 18-29 cohort was -.09. As a result, the fourth hypothesis was not supported.

The cohort that was 18-29 in 1956 shows a stronger increase in personality-related knowledge than the 30-41 and 42-53 cohorts (Table 1). The 18-29 cohort goes from a -.15 score in 1956 to .02 in 1968 and .17 in 1980. The 30-41 cohort also increases in

personality knowledge, going from .01 in 1956 to .14 in 1980, but not as much as the younger cohort. The 42-53 cohort actually declines in personality knowledge, going from .13 in 1956 to -.02 in 1968 and climbing slightly to .06 in 1980. The results were consistent with the fifth hypothesis.

The 30-41 and 42-53 cohorts in 1956 declined in issue knowledge by 1980, failing to support the sixth hypothesis.

Table 3 about here

The younger cohort, contrary to expectations, increased slightly in issue knowledge, going from .12 to .17.

The opposite of the expected effect also occurred with political knowledge in general, contradicting the seventh hypothesis. Contrary to expectations, the 18-29 cohort (1956)

Table 4 about here

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increased in general political knowledge while the older cohorts (30-41 and 42-53) declined in political knowledge.

In looking at the data outside the framework of the hypotheses, a strong period effect is evident in media use.

Table 5 about here

Means of 2.0 to 2.8 in 1956 declined to 1.3 and 1.5 in 1968, and dropped to 1.0 for all age groups in 1980.

Period effect also can be seen in issue knowledge for 1968, when the scores cluster about the mean and range from -.03 to .03. Personality knowledge also clusters around the mean for all groups in 1968 except the 66 and older group, which has a score of -.12.

It is noteworthy that the 66 and older group shows an increasing knowledge of personality, reflecting age effects, as the scores climb from -.17 to -.12 to .06. The only consistent age effects for overall political knowledge occur in the 30-41 and 54-65 age groups, which have respective ranges of .05 to .09 and -.02 to .02 for the three periods.

For party knowledge, some age effect is evident, with the youngest age group showing negative scores across all periods and the 30-41 group being consistently positive in all periods. The other age groups, however, have slight ranges of small negative to positive scores.

DISCUSSION

The period effects showing declining media use are not particularly surprising and may have been expected when a person had to be a high or regular user of a medium to score on it for the index scale. As a result, passive participation in television and radio could cause lower scores even though the number of media being used are higher in 1980 than in 1956.

The higher means for media use in 1956 also may have been a result of the novelty of television, people paying closer attention to it and being more actively involved. Also, the entrenchment of television as a single source of news may be the reson for the declining mean in 1968 and 1980.

But the declining media use did not appear to have had similar effects for all age groups. The two oldest age groups are in the lower range of political knowledge in all time periods, even though the groups' mean scores on media use are consistently equal to or higher than other groups' means. In part, this may reflect changing media or changing uses of it. Media and personality knowledge are significantly correlated in 1968 and 1980, but not in 1956. Several explanations are possible. Perhaps media were less personality oriented in 1956 -- the correlation for issue knowledge and media use in 1968 and 1956 is low, and is virtually non-existent in 1980. People may also be using TV more in 1968 and 1980, while the character of the medium is constant in all three periods. The correlation could even be a matter of the political process, with candidate appeals changing in response to the medium and political news from all media taking

on more personality angles.

A "media generation" could be responsible for the 18-29 cohort (1956) that climbs steadily in political knowledge while other cohorts either stay constant or decline. Rather than a TV generation that fails to be versed in the issues of the day, it may be a media generation using media more effectively than older cohorts. While mean scores for media use decline at about the same rate for the three youngest cohorts in 1956, scores for political knowledge increase for the 18-29 cohort. As a result, the cohort may be getting more information from less media, adjusting to the varied landscape of media better than the older cohorts, who appear to be getting less information than the younger cohort even though media use is about the same. This is supported by data showing a decline in issue knowledge for the older cohorts and an increase for the younger cohort.

The .2 correlation between media and issue knowledge in 1968 and 1980 is overshadowed by a .3 correlation (p=.00) between media and personality knowledge in the same two years. This may suggest a change in media -- newspapers and magazines becoming less issue oriented and more personality oriented than conventional wisdom would hold. Also, the declining influence of newspapers over the past three decades and the increasing influence of television would suggest more political knowledge in general but on a narrower range of topics -- personality only rather than personality, issue and political party topics. This idea may be reflected in finding the youngest cohort getting more personality knowledge than other cohorts.

An issue raised by the results of this study but not directly addressed by the hypotheses is one of the kinds of information being obtained from different media and how different age groups respond to a medium. For example, what kind of information is actually obtained from newspapers and what kind of information is actually obtained by users of television? The question is not what is offered but what the user gets from a medium. Though newspapers and television are apparently quite different in their offerings, does the difference carry through to the kinds of information being absorbed and retained by the media user? And does one age group retain the same information as another age group? Or, phrased differently, is the cognitive reaction to television or newspapers the same for young people, middle age people and older people?

Such questions are raised in this study by the variety of levels of political knowledge in different time periods for different cohorts and age groups while media decline steadily for all age groups.

This issue leads to one that deals with demographic variables other than age. Socio-economic status, education, sex, race and other variables may also have an effect on the way an individual absorbs and uses information from media.

SUMMARY

A cohort analysis is used to study media and political knowledge, which is divided into knowledge of issues, personalities and political parties. National election studies from 1956, 1968 and 1980 are used.

Knowledge levels were calculated by creating indices from open-ended questions about why a person liked or disliked a candidate. Since the number of questions varied in each study (creating scales of different magnitudes for each data set), Z scores were calculated and crosstabulated with each age group.

The respondents to the surveys are divided into five age groups and the data analyzed for age, period and cohort effects. All age groups declined steadily in media use from 1956 to 1980. The youngest cohort, which was 18-29 in 1956, showed a stronger increase in personality related knowledge than the 30-41 and 42-53 cohorts. However, the youngest cohort also showed increased issue knowledge and political knowledge in general while, surprisingly, the older cohorts declined in both areas.

Age effects are noteworthy in several instances: the youngest age group is consistently below the mean for political party knowledge in all time periods and the 30-41 age group always above the mean. The 66 and older group has increasingly higher scores for personality knowledge over the course of the study, demonstrating an age effect.

As a result of constant decline in media for all ages and an upward trend in knowledge for the youngest cohort, it is suggested that a "media generation" may be using media more efficiently than its elders. Rather than a TV generation, the younger people may be more effective users of media, using the same amount of media but getting more information than older people.

TABLE 1

PERSONALITY KNOWLEDGE (Z scores)

	1956	1968	1980
18-29	-.15	.04	-.12
30-41	.01	.02	.01
42-53	.13	.04	.17
54-65	.07	-.02	.14
66 & older	-.17	-.12	.06

An index of personality knowledge was created by totaling responses that indicated like or dislike of a candidate based on character, leadership ability, experience and philosophy. The higher the number of responses in these categories, the higher the score on personality knowledge. This table shows an increasing personality knowledge for the 18-29 cohort from 1956 to 1980. The 30-41 age group shows a fairly constant level of knowledge, while the cohort that is 30-41 in 1956 shows an increasing level of knowledge. The age effect is seen by reading across the table (as with the 30-41 age group), the cohort effect by reading diagonally as a cohort ages from one study to the next. Z scores were used because the number of possible responses varied from one study to the next, making a comparison of means impossible.

TABLE 2

POLITICAL PARTY KNOWLEDGE (Z scores)

	1956	1968	1980
18-29	-.06	-.14	-.06
30-41	.04	.12	.06
42-53	-.03	.06	.00
54-65	.03	-.06	.05
66 & older	.03	-.0	-.01

Party knowledge is calculated by totaling responses for like or dislike of a candidate based on whether the respondent felt the candidate was a good or bad representative of the party, and what groups the respondent perceived the candidate to be aligned with or opposed to. The results are mixed, with the 30-41 age group being constantly above the mean in party knowledge, and the cohort that is 30-41 in 1956 being fairly constant in its level of party knowledge through all three studies. The 18-29 age group is consistently below the mean, and the cohort that is 18-29 in 1956 shows fluctuating levels of party knowledge in the three years studied. The cohort effect is seen by reading diagonally across the table as a group ages from one study to the next, and age effect by reading across for an age group in all three periods. Z scores were used because the number of possible responses varied from one study to the next.

TABLE 3

ISSUE KNOWLEDGE (Z scores)

	1956	1968	1980
18-29	.12	-.03	.22
30-41	.07	.01	.08
42-53	-.02	-.03	.17
54-65	-.09	.03	-.11
66 & older	-.21	.03	-.37

Responses indicating like or dislike for a candidate based on the candidate's foreign or domestic policies were the basis for an issue knowledge index. The cohort that is 30-41 in 1956 shows declining issue knowledge, as does the 42-53 cohort though it increases slightly in 1968. A period effect is evident in 1968, when all groups are within .03 of the mean. The cohort that is 18-29 in 1956 is the only cohort above the mean in all three time periods. The period effect for 1968 is seen by reading down the column, the cohort effects by reading diagonally across the table as a cohort ages from one study to the next. Z scores were used because the number of questions asked in each time period varied.

TABLE 4

GENERAL POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE (Z scores)

	1956	1968	1980
18-29	-.09	-.09	.05
30-41	.05	.09	.07
42-53	.09	.03	.21
54-65	.00	-.02	.02
66 & older	-.18	-.05	-.19

General political knowledge was gauged by totaling responses to all open-ended questions about why the respondent likes or dislikes a candidate. This category encompasses all of the responses used to determine issue, personality and party knowledge. The cohort that is 18-29 in 1956 shows increasing knowledge, while the cohort that is 42-53 in 1956 shows declining knowledge. This is seen by reading diagonally across the table as the cohort ages from one period to the next. Z scores were used for comparison because the number of possible responses varied in the studies.

TABLE 5

MEDIA USE (mean scores)

	1956	1968	1980
18-29	2.0	1.3	1.0
30-41	2.2	1.5	1.0
42-53	2.3	1.5	1.0
54-65	2.8	1.5	1.0
66 & older	2.1	1.5	1.0

(scale: zero to four)

Strong period effects are evident in media use. Period effects are seen by reading down the columns. All age groups declined in media use from 1956 to 1980. The four media respondents were questioned about were radio, television, newspapers and magazines.

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